



THE ISLAMIC BULLETIN

Issue 22

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ASSALAMU ALAIKUM!

Ramadan is one of the most important events in Islam. It is also one of the most anticipated and exciting holidays of the year. Just like any other large holiday, excitement starts to build weeks before the month actually begins! It officially begins when the first silver crescent of the calendar 9th month's moon is spotted in the night sky. What if we made a resolution to Allah that this Ramadan is the beginning of the new me? As others make their resolutions for New Year, Ramadan would be a starting point as a new resolution for Muslims.

During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims abstain from eating, drinking and smoking during daylight hours. Fasting in this way allows Muslims and their families' time to revitalize many of the teachings of the Qur'an in their lives. By fasting, Muslims have an opportunity to focus on many lessons that make up the very tenets of their religion; some of the most important lessons are self-control, inner reflection and the importance of charity. Muslims often make a special effort to donate money, food, and goods to charities or people in their community during the month of Ramadan.

Just as fasting is an opportunity to learn the lessons of Qur'an, so is the daily ritual of breaking the fast. Suhoor (breakfast) and Iftar (evening meal) are times to bask in the importance of community and family, and to experience thankfulness for the good things that are in their lives. During Ramadan, the morning and evening meals are treasured because they offer the chance for family and friends to eat and celebrate together. People meet at the Mosque or in each other's homes and appreciate the unity of Islam.

Of all the deeds we keep ourselves busy with, it is only fasting which Allah considers purely for Himself. This means that fasting is a gift from you to Allah! When you give a gift to someone you love, you make it as special as you can ... even choosing the best wrapping paper. What about giving a gift to Allah!

Try to make each day you fast as special as you can. How? Pray on time, give a charity each day, DON'T COMPLAIN, fill your day with deeds that you know Allah loves. And stay away from the things you know He hates such as backbiting, gossiping, lying, etc. Instead let us reflect people who are actually starving without a meal at the end of the day.

People need to understand that we are brothers one of another in our faith. There is only one God no matter what. No matter how you relate to Him, Our God is your God.

Make your "wrapping paper" taqwa (God-Consciences) and fast a day that you can be proud of. Remind yourself that you are not just fasting to get to maghrib and eat, you are not just fasting because everyone else is, you are not fasting to lose weight. You are fasting for ALLAH. (And be sure Allah knows exactly why you are fasting). This is your time to give Him something back for all He gave you. You give such nice gifts to your friends. But He is Allah. Why not give Him the best gift that you can?

We would like to ask each of our readers to remember us in your Duhas. May Allah strengthen our remembrance in Him, and help us strive to become better Muslims, Ameen.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Dear Neighbors:

I am writing to you because I do not know the address of the Mosque I pass on my way to the Farmer's Market on Alemany Boulevard, nor how to write to the people who shop at the market with me. I hope you will pass my letter on. I want to tell you how valuable it is to me that we share this community. I'm so glad to live somewhere that everyday reminds me that my small way of life may be different from my neighbor's and, that we can still live together peacefully and fruitfully.

I especially love my Saturday morning trips to the Farmer's Market. I cross Mission Street and pass the Mosque, often

just as people are standing outside talking. It reminds me to thank God for my day. The market is a microcosm of how the world could be: everyone being themselves, rejoicing in shopping with others who are very different from them. We share recipes and explore new flavors. I have learned from a Muslim woman in a shawl how to use the mysterious leaves I see everyone buying and from a Chinese woman with big strong hands how to prepare lemon grass. I've shown an Afghan man in a wool hat how to prepare and eat an artichoke.

I know that you have been attacked, sent hate mail and suffered threatening telephone calls. I hope this letter of friendship and thanksgiving that you are my neighbors will in some small way help to heal the wounds that should not have been inflicted upon you.

In God's love,

Martha Stookey, San Francisco, CA

Dear Editor:

My husband and I are originally from Detroit, Michigan and converted to Islam sometime ago. I had been reading and following your newsletter while I was living in the US. To learn more about this beautiful religion, we moved to Makkah, Saudi Arabia. My family always looks forward to every issue of your newsletter. I wanted to share this letter with other readers about my mother-in-law.

We used to discuss the religion of Islam with my husband's family. When my oldest daughter was a little over a year old she had pneumonia and was eventually hospitalized. My mother-in-law came to stay with us and help. During that time she asked us about salat (prayer) and even had me show her how to make wudhu (ablution). She was very close to becoming Muslim, but felt that she would be betraying God, to whom she had always turned, by joining another religion. We explained to her that it was the SAME GOD and that Islam was His religion. She hesitated and then returned home when all was well with our family.

Years passed and we continued to discuss things with her. She was the most open of his family; his father, the least open. About 15 years ago his father died. We still talked to her but she was hesitant and then finally, one day after a frustrating argument about the prophets, peace be upon them, I told my husband that I didn't think that she

would ever become Muslim. May Allah forgive me. I read a hadith (sayings of the Prophet PBUH) a long time ago (don't ask me for the source) that said words to the effect that you should never say that the people are finished

My mother-in-law (she was 70 years old then) came to visit us from the States. We took an apartment in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia which was located near a masjid and stayed there for a month. When she first heard the adhan, she said that she had heard it in her sleep years ago - she lived in the midst of Detroit where, at that time, there were no mosques in the area where she lived. When we went to the souq (market) and she saw how the shops all closed for salat, she said, "This is truly a people who think about God."

Unbeknownst to us, she was asking our children how to make wudhu, how to pray, and about various beliefs. Subhaanallah, they never told us anything! At the end of a month, she came to us and told us she wanted to become Muslim. It was a shock, a pleasant shock! We went down to the court; she declared the shahaadah and the next day we packed up and headed for home - Makkah. We made Umrah with her and performed many salats in Makkah, at the Haram. She was really cute on Umrah. We had completed 2 saie (rounds) and she turned to me and said, "Well, that's not so bad." I smiled and told her that we had 5 more to go.

We proceeded slowly, stopping and sitting on the side once or twice. When it was completed, she said she was glad that it was encouraged to do at least once in a Muslim's life. I laughed. At one gathering, we were sitting on the side and I was trying to tell her that she was of an age where she didn't have to wear hijab. I was trying to put it in a nice way that once a woman reached an age where she no longer was of marriageable age, she did not have to wear it. Before I could get the words all the way out, she cut me a look that let me know that SHE didn't consider herself in that category, so I just dropped it.

We taught her salat and I made diagrams for her with transliterations of the words with the meanings. Unfortunately, all of this coincided with the war. Her daughter and sons in the States kept calling and telling her to get out of Saudi Arabia because there was going to be a war. We sent her home reluctantly. I wanted to work more with her on her salat. It was really sad to see her go. She was a tall, proud looking woman who got on that plane wearing hijab and a beige abaya (cloak). We kept in constant touch. About 9 months later she excitedly called to tell us that she had memorized Suratul Fatiha (Opening Chapter), and was trying to keep her fast for Ramadan. Due to the fact that she had hypertension and had special medication to take at certain times during the day, she was extremely saddened that she was unable to keep her fast. That following Hajj, my husband performed Hajj on her behalf.

During the summer when school let out, we were headed back to Detroit-- tickets in hand and all. My husband's sister called and gave us the devastating news that my mother-in-law had died. I was so stunned and saddened that we would not see her again that the telephone slipped out of my hand. We rushed home to lead her Janazah (funeral). His sister arranged that her grave be in a separate plot in the cemetery FACING MAKKAH. We did not even ask her to do that. SubhanAllah, I always thank Allah that there was not a lot of disagreement involving the funeral and washing the body, etc., as can happen when one person is Muslim and the rest of the family is not. Many people came to the funeral and as a result asked my husband many questions about Islam. I constantly pray for Allah's mercy and forgiveness for the woman who gave birth to the man I married, who became Muslim with me on the same day as I did, who fathered my 6 children and remains with me in Makkah to this day. She was the best possible mother-in-law. She was my sister and mother in Islam. I pray for her and my daughters after every single salat. May Allah grant her Paradise and may we be able to join her on that DAY of days.

O Allah, grant us the good of this life, the good of the next life and protect us from the Fire. O Allah, let our last days be the best days of our life and our last deeds be the best of our deeds, and let the best day be the day we meet You.

Umm Rafiq, Makka

NEED TO CONTACT US?

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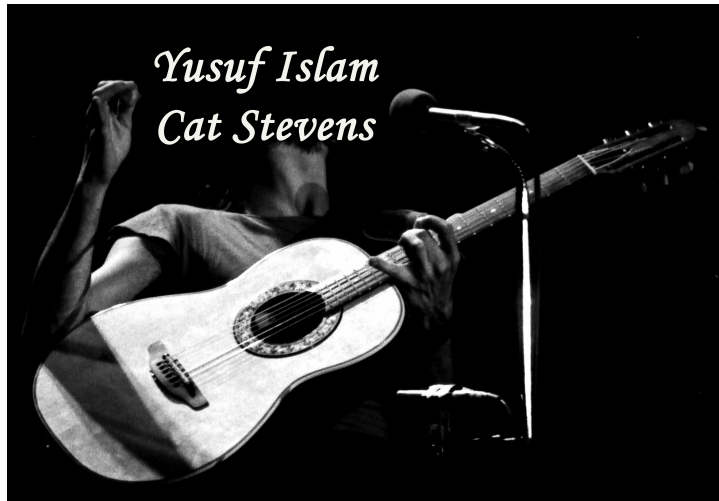
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SEARCHLIGHTING ISLAM



By Yusuf Islam (Formerly Cat Stevens)

Sadly for all of us, the world seems to have lost its balance and is now reeling out of control. A violent group cold-bloodedly murdered innocent civilians, hijacked a religion and a large army is out for justice - but more innocent lives will get destroyed.

It seems to me that someone like myself, having seen life from both sides-East and West-is rightly placed to comment and confront certain myths and try to reduce the demonization of a religion, which is still appallingly misrepresented.

In an old song of mine which today uncannily seems to sound like a metaphor for September 11, "Tuesday's Dead." I wrote, "I'm like him, just like you, I can't tell you what to do, like everybody else I'm searching through what I've heard."

Like other Westerners, I was wary of approaching Islam when I converted 23 years ago. I found that my songs were asking questions," Islam said. "But I was averse to religious dogma ... I wanted a more spiritual way of finding what's right and wrong."

During this personal search, I wrote well-known songs, such as "Peace Train." I never said where the train was going. I didn't know. The train was a symbol, rolling on the edge of darkness," Islam said.

In my search for answers, I turned to Buddhism, Eastern mysticism and even Pythagoras of my own Greek heritage. However, it was not my own search, but my brother David Gordon's travels that led me to the Islamic religion. After returning from a trip to Jerusalem, David bought me a copy of an English translation of the Qur'an as a present.

I discovered something different from the negative images portrayed. As well as belief in the one God of this universe, it was quite a revelation to find that the word Islam itself came from Salam or "Peace." A notion light years away from the violence and destruction we have all seen in recent weeks.

Scanning through the pages of the Qur'an back in the late 1970s, it amazed me how close Islam was to my religious

upbringing as a child. Prayer and charity, paradise and angels were mentioned; the Gospels and Torah of Jesus and Moses respectively were referred to.

Soon, the Quran was carrying me beyond home and customary landscapes, to a new religious shore inhabited by people I was always told to be suspicious of-Arabs and Muslims. But surprisingly, the Quran was full of stories and instruction from the history of mankind as a whole.

It did not speak in favor of one special race against others. It said although we may be from different countries and tribes, we were all human born of the same original parents, Adam and Eve.

The Quran directly says: "The best of people are the most God-conscious." In 1977 I was listening, and quietly decided to embrace Islam.

Since then, I am still surprised how little people know about a religion of over one billion fellow humans. After the nightmare of September 11 and what followed, it's vital that people get to understand more about Muslim beliefs. This is why I feel it is necessary to write and shine a searchlight on Islam's hidden reality.

Most newcomers to a faith go through an initially zealous phase-call it "born again" -followed by a period of measure and maturity. Muhammad Ali, the boxer, is good example of that learning curve. I was no different. All I wanted was to be as far away from showbiz lights as possible.

So suddenly it was blackout. I stopped drinking but still continued in the studio to make records. Naturally, what the public didn't see was my spiritual growth, subtly softening the ragged edges of my character. The media likes big paintbrushes and, as usual, bypassed such details.

I announced the end of my career as Cat Stevens and sold all my instruments, giving the proceeds to charity. Having assumed my new name-Yusuf (as in the story of Joseph, son of Jacob) Islam-I grew my beard slightly longer and donned long white clothes-an image which instead of representing a spiritual disciple, to untrained westerners' eyes, now looks shockingly similar to their idea of public enemy No. 1.

Drinking, partying, celebrity girlfriends-turning my back on such a life-style was newsworthy for a time, but it wasn't really gossipy enough to continue writing about.

But at that time it was impossible for me to explain, so I shunned interviews and flashbulbs. The small number of fish-lens photos and garbled headlines that did come out, for many, were nothing but a confirmation that the Wild World I'd sang about had gone a bit wilder.

But beyond the well-known "O Baby, Baby it's a Wild World," chorus line, only a few recognized how uncannily some songs had double-tracked my future. The song, "The Boy with a Moon and Star on His Head", almost paints the whole story. Peace Train, Changes IV, Morning Has Broken--the list goes on and on. In one explicit lyric, "On The Road To Find Out," I actually mention picking up a "good book"!

For years after entering Islam I was too busy raising a family and establishing schools for little Muslim children to stop and explain. I didn't realize how vital communication with the public was.

At that time most of the media didn't seem very interested in my new life anyway-they were waiting for another sensational headline. That ungraciously came with the publication of the "Satanic Verses." Lamentably, what most people missed in that whole chapter was in the small print.

Still a relatively new Muslim, but being a well-known personality, I was invited to join a letter campaign requesting the publishers of the controversial novel to think again.

I did, but they ignored the plea. Suddenly the media tried linking me to supporting Iran's Fatwa on Salman Rushdie.

The fact is that I never did support the Fatwa. Such is the irony. You wouldn't ask a Christian to deny one of the Ten Commandments; equally, as a new Muslim, I couldn't deny that the Quran, just like Leviticus in the Bible, forbade blasphemy and if there is no repentance, made it a capital offence.

But what most people—including many Muslims—fail to recognize, is that the Quran repeatedly calls on believers to repent, to uphold the rule of civility and not to take the law in their own hands.

Clerics and extremists who call for the assassination of civilians outside the recognized bounds of the Islamic State without due process are wholly out of line with the limits and spirit of Islam. The Koran states, "And do not let your hatred of some people cause you to transgress (the law)."

My songs of love and harmony and I were now associated with death edicts and even the Ayatollah! That was a time of great emotion and uproar. I released a statement clarifying my position, but the press preferred to ignore it—perhaps for them it didn't go far enough.

At that time, I was still learning, ill prepared and lacking in knowledge and confidence to speak out specifically against forms of extremism. I wish to avoid making that same mistake again.

Today, I am aghast at the horror of recent events and feel it a duty to speak out. Not only did terrorists hijack planes and destroy life last September, but also they hijacked the beautiful religion of Islam and split the brother and sisterhood of mankind.

The targeting of unsuspecting civilians going about their daily work was energized by nothing but blind irreligious hatred. Yet we should remember, this kind of atrocity has been a common occurrence, year upon year, in many lands. My memory of the prolonged suffering and death of two hundred thousand people in Bosnia at the end of last century is something that I cannot easily forget.

However, it is also good to hear spiritual and political leaders across all countries and cultural divides making it clear that such acts of murder as were witnessed in the U.S. have nothing to do with the universal beliefs of Muslims; it's also important that retaliation does not become a representation of Christian wrath. The Koran states: "Repel evil with what is better and he, between whom and you was hatred, will become as a warm bosom-friend."

So out of the shadows of death, positive signs are arising, human beings are beginning to feel each other's pain. Tragedies can sometimes help breakdown the barriers of prejudice. In Chicago, three days after the attack, non-Muslim neighbors—Christian and other denominations—held hands in a circle to form a human chain around a Mosque in which Muslims were praying.

That chain, in the form of humanitarian aid, should stretch to those innocent and blameless people of Afghanistan and all fellow human beings like them who are still starving on the knife-edge of life and death.

If humanity can be revived through honor and deeds of compassion and charity, it is hoped that the tragedies of the past will herald a new tomorrow and a new sunrise of moral understanding for people all over the world. Our future is still glimmering brightly in the searchlight of children's eyes.

I belonged to that idealistic movement which grew up in the Sixties

and Seventies with undiminished dreams and hopes for a more peaceful world. There are multitudes of people around the world who don't want more wars and destruction. And I am still one of those.

Conflicts on earth seem endless, like day follows night. Life goes on and, regrettably, wars and terrorism are still very much with us. But nothing should stop us "dreaming about the world as one." Let's hope those words of my song "Peace Train" will one day be fulfilled

ACTOR WILL SMITH EMBRACES ISLAM

Muslim leaders across America acknowledging Will Smith for embracing Islam religion after completing the Muhammad Ali biopic. Smith was introduced to Islam while learning about the legendary boxer's life.

Friends close to Smith claim the megastar is now embracing the religion in his own life and is eager to learn more about it.

Director of the American Muslim Association of North America, Sofian Zakkout says, "Muhammad Ali is one of the best examples of Muslims in this country. He's been a wonderful spokesperson for the religion and if Will Smith can continue Muhammad Ali's work that would be wonderful."

He continues, "Islam is a peaceful religion and if good people such as Muhammad and Will can carry that message then it would be wonderful. It would be a positive message for peaceful Muslims all over the world."

Smith appeared at the America: A Tribute To Heroes telethon in September alongside Ali, defending Islam in the wake of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington.

MANY IN HAWAII TURNING TO ISLAM

By Mary Kaye Ritz -- Advertiser Religion Writer

Less than three weeks after terrorists struck New York City and Washington, Heather Ramaha stood among a group of women at the mosque in Manoa and recited the shahada in Arabic: "Ash-hadu alla illaha illa Allah. Wa-ash-hadu anna Mohamadan rassulu Allah." She was testifying that "I bear witness that there is no God but Allah (one true God), and Mohammed is a prophet of God." By doing so, she became a convert to the Islamic faith, extending a recent national trend.

Some Muslim clerics across the country say they are seeing a fourfold increase in conversions since Sept. 11, when stories about Islam jumped from the back pages of the religion section to front pages worldwide. Hakim Ouansafi, the president of the Muslim Association of Hawaii, said that prior to Sept. 11, there had been an average of three converts per month.

In the two months since then, there have been 23. And oddly enough for a religion that is often perceived as one that cloaks its women from head to foot, the newly converted Westerners tend to be female. Ouansafi said the national ratio of converts is 4-to-1, women to men. Here, he said, it's closer to 2-to-1.

Most Mainland converts are African-Americans, who make up about a third of U.S. Muslims, some of whom found Allah while they were in jail or in recovery from drug or alcohol addiction.

On the West Coast, the men are mainly military, said Ouansafi and most of the O'ahu converts are former Christians. More people are looking into Islam and liking what they see, he says, despite the relentless media coverage of Muslim terrorists. "Know you find bad people in every religion, and that religion should not be judged by that extreme minority," he said. One thing Sept. 11 did was remind people that life is too short: "If I'm going to die, I want to die a Muslim," a convert told Ouansafi.

Cromwell Crawford, chairman of the religion department at the University of Hawaii-Manoa, echoed that: The effect of Sept. 11 on the national psyche made all Americans aware of the transience of life. He described the mood of the country as changing: Singles seek to bond; family members hang together more tightly; and, by extension, the nation's people reach out to one another.

"People are turning to religion both in the institutional sense and in non-institutional ways," Crawford said, adding that the fallout also is benefiting other religions besides Islam.

WHY OVERWHELMINGLY WOMEN?

"In the expression of this mood, women are moved more readily and more deeply than men," he said. "Go to any church and you'll find more women than men." He also finds the female students in his classes often show greater insight into ethical issues. "Women are the more religious of the genders for various reasons," Crawford said. "... Women give birth and so they are in touch with the life process, caretakers of the life cycle by virtue of their biology."

Converting - or "reverting," as Muslims call it since they believe everyone starts life as a Muslim - does not take much besides a sincere belief there is one God, and only one God. "We believe, as Muslims, once a person reverts to Muslim, all his past sins are forgiven by God," Ouansafi said. "Starts just like a baby that was born."

The conversion ceremony itself is fairly simple, he said. A convert tells of the converting of his or her own free will; then explains the five tenets of faith. For the ceremony, two witnesses watch as a convert agrees that Jesus was among the great prophets (Ibrahim/Abraham, Mohammed and Moses are among the others), but not God, then speak the same two sentences that Heather Ramaha recited.

Now, Ramaha is incorporating her Islamic faith into her life as a Navy petty officer stationed at Pearl Harbor since July. She doesn't wear her hejab to work as a dental hygienist, but she does wear her head covering when attending services at the mosque. While her husband, a Marine, was away recently, she couldn't quite recite the five daily prayers, all said in Arabic, without his help.

But Ouansafi said the Islamic faith is supposed to be practiced to the best of one's abilities. It's forbidden in the Quran, for example, for pregnant women, travelers, and people with diabetes to fast at Ramadan, if fasting means harming oneself.

On a recent Friday - the Islamic equivalent of the weekly Sabbath - Ouansafi spoke at the prayer services about the role of women in Islam, and talked at length in an interview at his office with his wife, Michele Ouansafi, herself a convert, about what draws women to a faith some have called oppressive.

Women are revered in their faith, the Ouansafis said. The wearing of the hejab is for a women's own protection - they are away from the lascivious looks of men. The women pray in different rooms and behind the men so as not to be a distraction when worshippers kneel and place their foreheads to the floor. "Women are in back because we are the stronger of the two," said Michele Ouansafi with a laugh.

And all the major texts of religions - the Bible, the Torah, the Gospels - "in the Quran, women have more rights," her husband said. He noted that in the Quran ("the word of God, descended directly on the prophet through Gabriel," said Ouansafi), Eve and Adam were equally at fault for leaving the Garden of Eden. Eve wasn't the seductress. Many of the passages in the Quran are gender-neutral.

And, in Islam, Ouansafi said, the money a man makes goes for the family. The money a woman makes is hers, he said. Women are not obligated to work.

Michele Ouansafi converted after meeting her husband-to-be when he tutored her in Rhode Island in 1986, but she said he never asked her to convert. "Ours is a faith of attraction, not promotion," said the French Canadian woman with an MBA who works at Earth Tech, an environmental firm, as a contracts administrator.

For those women who see their place in the home, the Islamic faith can be very attractive, said Tamara Albertini, a UH philosophy professor who specializes in Islam and grew up in an Islamic country. The man is responsible for taking care of the earnings, and the woman rules the home.

Although Ramaha's husband, Mike, is a lifelong Muslim and a Palestinian who grew up in San Francisco, he was not the reason for her conversion, she said. "Mike never once tried to get me to convert," the 24-year-old 'Aiea resident said. "He said, 'If you want to do this, you can research it yourself, but I'll love you either way.'"

Ramaha has been searching for a way to explain her new faith to her family in California. She notes that most of their information about Islam comes from the TV movie, "Not Without My Daughter," a story about an American woman, an abusive Iranian husband and a subsequent fight over their child. "I haven't been able to find a way to tell them without them flipping out," she said. "I haven't told Dad. I tell him I go to the mosque, but I haven't told him I converted yet."

To people who ask her why she would choose a religion that some consider oppressive to women, she responds that they're mixing religion with culture. "Growing up in the U.S., Islamic faith doesn't have the culture mixed into it," she said. Ramaha was the first in her family to join a church. At age 5, she befriended the daughter of a non-denominational pastor and became a Christian. The rest of the family joined later. Her mother is still a churchgoer. But Ramaha said she struggled with the Christian view of the Holy Trinity. In March, she took an online world religions class through a California university. "I'd been a Christian for 18 years," she said. "There are so many loopholes in that religion. (Islam) opened up so many ideas. ... I felt that in my heart this was the right (one) for me."

As a follow-up, she took an introductory class on Islam in Hawaii. After Sept. 11, she started reading the Quran, and "something clicked." She converted soon after. "I've always felt drawn to something out there, (otherwise, there's) an emptiness," she said. "The only way I feel complete is when I have a religion, a God to pray to."



Are you ready to meet the woman who can get by without her looks?

It is late in the afternoon at the University of British Columbia and I have been cooped up in this library for hours, trying to compose a thesis for my American Literature term paper. Deciding that a break would help clear my thoughts, I leave the confines of the library to sit outside, only to hear a female voice come up from behind me to ask:

"Just how is it that you can live with yourself from day to day wearing that THING on your head and letting THEM control your life?" Granted, it is an original line, a creative way to break the ice, yet why the code words? Only because I've been yelled at in public before for reasons connected to my appearance do I know what this woman means.

Code word #1: "head thing" = 30inch X 30inch yellow and maroon flower patterned polyester blend, a piece of cloth I happen to be wearing to cover my head and neck.

Code word #2: "them" = all Muslim men who, sinister-like with their dark beards, heavy accents, and hidden Uzi's get a rush out of making women their life-long slaves.

Having deciphered all this quickly, I turn to face the stranger- a cross looking thing. I smile politely and signal to the empty chair beside me: "Would you like to have a seat?"

HIJAB, the head to ankle covering that leaves only the face, hands, and feet visible in public, has made me a very patient Muslim woman. The brave individuals who have mustered the courage to verbally express their opinions about my scarf haven't been the most trying. There are many who can't formulate words coherent enough to communicate their disapproval, and so, rely on simple gestures and sign language.

Walking through downtown Vancouver, Canada, I've been fingered, spat on, scowled, and cursed at. Stepping into an elevator, I once traumatized a man who could do nothing but shuffle into the corner of the empty lift and mutter "What the --? WHAT THE --?!?!?!?" I have to take the agitation, the horror, and even the hatred in a stride. But never will I be silent about it.

I can ignore the flagrant distortions no more than I can deny the fact that I am a Muslim living in Canada. Who I am and what popular culture thinks I am, has become a tug-of-war-competition of who can explain the status of the Muslim hijab-wearer convincingly. The media tells the public that I am a weak freak of nature who has been forced to subject herself to the tyranny of Muslim fundamentalists. Catherine Meckes assesses that wearing hijab is "some kind of twisted logic" because it entraps women like animals in a cage.

The Muslim dress code, she argues, is a form of hiding from society so that I don't have to deal with the realities of my "natural habitat." Ms. Meckes seems to be familiar enough with the Western culture to know that women are constantly objectified, used as commodities, tools to sell beer and boost sales for the next football season. Sadly enough, though, she views women who wish to distance themselves from this commercial degradation with fear.

She finds women who cover "disturbing" and wished that she didn't have to confront them on their "home turf." Pardon my feeble-mindedness, I've pinned my scarf on too tight and squeezed reason out of my brain....just WHO is running away from the truth? I have chosen

way of ridicule by a society that demands women to conform to certain ideals. I have refused to hide in the crowded university hallways and malls by looking the way Cindy, Cosmo, or Calvin Klein think I should - all because I'm a spineless caged rodent?!?!?

I have rejected the hip-hugging jeans, the breast-enhancing halter tops, the poofy hair and made-up face, and accepted hijab so that I can be appreciated for my intellect and personality rather than my figure or fashion sense.

When I face a classmate or colleague I can be confident that my body is not being scrutinized, my bra-strap or pantyline visible. I have repudiated the perverted values of our society by choosing to assert myself only through my mind. I understand my "natural habitat" very well thank you!

I fully comprehend the distorted image of the "ideal woman," but the difference between me and the Catherine Meckes's of the world is that I am NOT afraid to defy those standards. Islam liberated me from THAT prison.

Perhaps hijab is so misunderstood because it is prescribed by a religion that makes a bold and shocking statement: Women are precious creatures who have the right to be valued for who they are, and not what they can juggle.

When I decided to start wearing hijab, my mother pulled me aside and posed this question: "If you found a diamond that was exquisite in every way, would you show it to all your friends, let them gawk at its dazzle, caress it, or would you covet the stone and protect it by preserving its natural splendor?"

Once you bear something for all to see, the second you display something for its beauty, you objectify it and diminish its value. Because its worth is built on its ability to attract, when it no longer elicits awe from onlookers it becomes worthless. Is it a wonder that neck lines keep plunging every year? - more cleavage means women won't bore ogles, the commercial industries, and the rest of society for awhile. But when will those skirts quit shortening?? For how long will women remain sex objects??

Islam tells us that every woman is a jewel and when she respects herself enough to preserve her beauty for herself and her loved ones, she rejects being objectified by a society which does NOT value her. Only the dearest people in my life know me without hijab because they love me enough to value ALL of me. John and Jane Doe don't love me or care for me, so why must I meet their notions of an "ideal woman" if they are meaningless to me?

It is the desire to please popular culture that makes 15 year old girls want to fit into Kate Moss's jeans by sticking their fingers down their throats and wrenching (throwing up) three times a day. It is the unattainable Perfect-Body society has conjured, that make "fat", "ugly" girls splatter themselves on sidewalks because they just are "not thin and pretty enough". AND THEY TELL ME ISLAM OPPRESSES WOMEN??

I am thankful that I am not suicidal or psychologically unbalanced because I can't meet the demands of my culture. I am fortunate that my concerns and goals in life lie on a higher plane than the dictates of a pretty fashion industry. I am quite content with my religion, for it values my power to achieve great things through my mind, not through my body.

Whether I am physically beautiful or not, you have no clue. Perhaps this fact is disturbing for Catherine Meckes and the library stranger because they are not ready to meet a woman who can get by without her looks. Then again, perhaps it is because they are just ignorant of the (WHAT IS IT?) facts. Either way, I don't need anyone's sympathy, I am not really that scary, and your anger does me no harm.

I am not under duress, or a male-worshipping female captive from the barbarous Arabian deserts. I'VE BEEN LIBERATED!

"Your Lord Allah has decreed that you worship none but Him and that you be kind to parents whether one or both of them attain old age in your life. Say not to them a word of contempt nor repel them but address them in terms of honor and out of kindness lower to them the wing of humility and say - 'My Lord bestow on both of them Your mercy as they cherished me in my childhood.'" (Quran 17:23-24)

THE MIRACLES OF ZAMZAM

The story of Ibrahim (AS) is well known to Jews and Christians as well as to Muslims. In Islam he is remembered as one of the great Prophets, and as the father of the Prophet Isma'il (AS), who was the ancestor of Mohammed (SAW) himself. Centuries ago, Hagar searched desperately for water in the hills of Safa and Marwa to give to her newly born son Ismail (AS). As she ran from one place to another in search of water, her child rubbed his feet against the sand. A pool of water surfaced, and by the grace of God, shaped itself into a well which came to be called Zamzam water.

Let me go back to how it all started. In 1971, an Egyptian doctor wrote to the European Press, a letter saying that Zamzam water was not fit for drinking purposes. I immediately thought that this was just a form of prejudice against the Muslims and that since his statement was based on the assumption that since the Ka'aba was a shallow place (below sea level) and located in the center of the city of Makkah, all the wastewater of the city collecting through the drains fell into the well holding the water.

Fortunately, the news came to King Faisal's ears who got extremely angry and decided to disprove the Egyptian doctor's provocative statement. He immediately ordered the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources to investigate and send samples of Zamzam water to European laboratories for testing the potability of the water.

The ministry then instructed the Jeddah Power and Desalination Plants to carry out this task. It was here that I was employed as a desalting engineer (chemical engineer to produce drinking water from sea water) and was chosen to carry out this assignment.

At this stage, I remember that I had no idea what the well holding the water looked like. I went to Makkah and reported to the authorities at the Ka'aba explaining the purpose of my visit. They assigned a man to give me whatever help was required. When we reached the well, it was hard for me to believe that a pool of water, more like a small pond, about 18 by 14 feet, was the well that supplied millions of gallons of water every year to pilgrims ever since it came into existence at the time of Prophet Ibrahim (AS), many, many centuries ago.

I started my investigations and took the dimensions of the well. I asked the man to show me the depth of the well. First he took a shower and descended into the water. Then he straightened his body. I saw that the water level came up to just above his shoulders. His height was around 5 feet, 8 inches. He then started moving from one corner to the other in the well (standing all the while since he was not allowed to dip his head into the water) in search of any inlet or pipeline inside the well to see from where the water came in. However, the man reported that he could not find any inlet or pipeline inside the well.

I thought of another idea. The water could be withdrawn rapidly with the help of a big transfer pump which was in-

stalled at the well for the Zamzam water storage tanks. In this way, the water level would drop enabling us to locate the point of entry of the water. Surprisingly, nothing was observed during the pumping period, but I knew that this was the only method by which you could find the entrance of the water to the well. So I decided to repeat the process. But this time I instructed the man to stand still at one place and carefully observe any unusual thing happening inside the well. After a while, he suddenly raised his hands and shouted, "Alhamdulillah! I have found it. The sand is dancing beneath my feet as the water oozes out of the bed of the well."

Then he moved around the well during the pumping period and noticed the same phenomenon everywhere in the well. Actually the flow of water into the well through the bed was equal at every point, thus keeping the level of the water steady. After I finished my observations I took the samples of the water for European laboratories to test. Before I left the Ka'aba, I asked the authorities about the other wells around Makkah. I was told that these wells were mostly dry.

When I reached my office in Jeddah I reported my findings to my boss who listened with great interest but made a very irrational comment that the Zamzam well could be internally connected to the Red Sea. How was it possible when Makkah is about 50 miles away from the sea and the wells located before the city usually remains dry?

The results of the samples tested by the European labs and the one we analyzed in our lab were found to be almost identical. The difference between Zamzam water and other water (city water) was in the quantity of calcium and magnesium salts. The content of these was slightly higher in Zamzam water. This may be why Zamzam water refreshes tired pilgrims, but more significantly, the water contains fluorides that have an effective germicidal action.

Moreover, the remarks of the European labs showed that the water was fit for drinking. Hence the statement made by the Egyptian doctor was proved false. In a way, it was a blessing that this study was undertaken to show the chemical composition of the water. In fact, the more you explore, the more wonders surface and you find yourself believing implicitly in the miracles of Zamzam water that God bestowed as a gift on the faithful coming from far and wide to the desert land for pilgrimage.

Let me sum up some of the features of Zamzam water. This well has never dried up. On the contrary it has always fulfilled the demand for water. It has always maintained the same salt composition and taste ever since it came into existence. Its potability has always been universally recognized as pilgrims from all over the world visit Ka'aba every year for Hajj and Umrah, but have never complained about it. Instead, they have always enjoyed the water that refreshes them. Zamzam water's appeal has always been universal. This water has never been chemically treated or chlorinated as is the case with water pumped into the cities. Biological growth and vegetation usually takes place in most wells. This makes the water unpalatable owing to the growth of algae causing taste and odor problems. But in the case of the Zamzam water well there wasn't any sign of biological growth.

ISLAM IS THE FASTEST GROWING RELIGION IN THE US

By Stephen Magagnini

A SENSE OF PEACE AND CONNECTEDNESS

Todd Wilson, a third-generation Italian American, swore off his beloved prosciutto. Thy Loun, a refugee from Cambodia now attending UC Davis, had to give up her twice-weekly staple of double-pepperoni pizza.

Wilson, 31, and Loun, 21, say they've sacrificed their favorite foods (both made from pork) for something more fulfilling: their belief in Islam. They are among an increasing number of converts who have made Islam the fastest-growing religion in America.

There are now as many as 7 million Muslims in the United States - half of them American-born. In recent years, Americans of African, European, Southeast Asian, Latin American and American Indian descent have left their parents' spiritual paths to follow Islam, a religion that includes more than 1 billion believers from nearly every country.

At 10 p.m. on a recent Thursday, Wilson joined several dozen worshippers of different races and ethnic backgrounds at SALAM Mosque in North Sacramento for the last of the day's five prayers. Wilson, who teaches sixth grade in Elk Grove, observes his midday prayer between classes.

A one-time Marxist who still has posters of the late revolutionary Che Guevara, Wilson says Islam gives him a sense of peace and connectedness he never found in Catholicism, the religion of his parents. He and other made-in-America Muslims often combine the American values of democracy and gender equality with Islamic ideals, such as devotion to family, charity, modesty (women often cover their heads, arms and legs) and bans on alcohol, pork, smoking and premarital sex.

The growth of Islam in America has led to a growing acceptance of the hijab (the head cover worn by many Muslim women) and daily Muslim prayers during breaks at schools and workplaces.

Sacramento, home to the oldest mosque west of the Mississippi, at 411 V St., now has nine mosques, several Islamic schools and a Muslim cemetery. Community leaders estimate 35,000 Muslims live in the Sacramento area.

Wilson, Loun and dozens of others interviewed say they were drawn to Islam because it places emphasis on prayer rather than on place of worship - no idols or icons are found in mosques, which tend to be relatively spare - and because it attracts a diverse group of followers across the economic and ethnic spectrum.

While many people associate Muslims with Arabs, most Muslims aren't Arabs, and millions of Arabs aren't Muslim. At a Muslim picnic in Sacramento's Haggan Oaks Park last summer, believers from 20 nations prayed and ate barbecue together.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN ISLAM

Islam, like other religions, is interpreted differently in different cultures. From the time of the prophet Muhammad, who Muslims believe received the word of God (the Qur'an) in the seventh century, Muslim women were allowed to choose their husbands, divorce, own property and do battle - rights afforded few Western women at the time, said Kathleen O'Connor, who teaches Islam and the Qur'an at the University of California, Davis.

"This Western notion that Muslim women are all tied up in a closet somewhere, bound and gagged, is utterly ridiculous," O'Connor said.

Only a small minority of Muslims advocate violence in the name of religion, O'Connor said. "They're just like (U.S.) paramilitary groups - you wouldn't judge Americans by Oklahoma City."

African Americans account for 30 percent of America's Muslims, according to O'Connor. She said the figure isn't surprising given that as many as 20 percent of the Africans brought to the United States as slaves were Muslim.

AFRICAN AMERICANS COMING TO ISLAM

"African Americans who have converted to Islam believe it represents a return to cultural roots pre-slavery, a culture of self-respect and independence," O'Connor said. "And Islam is a religion of social justice. This speaks to blacks, whose experience has (often) been marked by injustice. They don't want to turn the other cheek - they've been turning it for 200 years."

Like many African American Muslims, Askia Muhammad Abdulmajeed came to Islam after experimenting with the Nation of Islam, an African American group led by Louis Farrakhan that is not part of orthodox Islam.

Abdulmajeed, 56, joined the Nation of Islam under the late Elijah Muhammad in the early 1970s. He said he admired the Nation's self-help approach to inner-city problems but said he was repulsed by its anti-Semitic, anti-white doctrine.

He says Allah saved him from himself: "I was into drugs, I ran with a fast crowd, didn't hold down a job very long. My perception of women was decidedly chauvinistic."

He ultimately became an Imam, or prayer leader, and now serves as a sort of Muslim circuit preacher who travels from mosque to mosque, explaining the Qur'an in modern American terms.

Abdulmajeed, like many American Muslims, is trying to strike a balance between American notions of equality and democracy and much-older Islamic laws that preach absolute adherence to the Qur'an.

His wife "can be a CEO as long as she doesn't walk away from her responsibility as a wife and mother," he said. "If my wife is uneducated, unsophisticated, what kind of children is she going to raise?"

Wilson, Abdulmajeed and other American converts appreciate Islam's rigorous, direct relationship with God. Muslims are expected to pray, in a kneeling position with their foreheads touching the floor, five times a day. Where they pray is immaterial as long as they're facing Mecca. They also are required to fast during Ramadan - one month out of each year during which Muslims are to abstain from food, water, sex and arguing from sun-up to sundown.

LATINO MUSLIMS

In April, California State University, Sacramento, hosted a forum on the "Islamic Presence in Latin America" before and after Columbus.

One of the speakers, Salvadoran-born AbdulHadi Bazurto (President of Latin American Muslim Unity), said the more he examined his roots, the more he questioned the validity of Catholicism in his life.

"Since the day the Spanish arrived, we as people have suffered a

lot," he said. "Christianity's 'white God' concept was harmful to our people, who were definitely not white."

Another speaker, Daniel Denton, a Stockton elementary school teacher who was born in Mexico, said he was a hard-drinking veteran of the Gulf War when he began to explore Islam in 1994. At the invitation of Muslims at Delta College, he went to a mosque.

"There was a carpet on the floor, and the walls were bare. I wondered, 'Where is everything?' and then I realized that was everything. If you go to a Catholic church, every few feet they have an image or a statue, but in Islam, there is no association between God and any image."

Denton also was impressed by the Islamic belief that each individual will be judged by their deeds on Judgment Day. That night, he took the shahada, the Muslim vow that says "There is only one God, Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger."

When he started fasting for Ramadan, "I heard my relatives in Stockton were calling my mom in San Diego and telling her I had become a terrorist and was doing drugs," Denton said. "When I went down to San Diego toward the end of Ramadan, I had lost 15 pounds and was starting to grow my beard. My mom was just in tears for days."

But, Denton said, his mother soon realized that instead of partying, he was staying home and talking to her as he had never done before.

"As she began to see the change, she came to accept it, and now she's happy. There's a saying in Islam that goes, 'Heaven lies at the feet of the mother. You have to treat her well at all times, take care of her.'"

Denton, 29, sees similarities between Islamic and Latino culture. "I've noticed that if you take away the crosses, the alcohol and the pork, the smells in my house are similar to Muslim homes. So is the behavior - the respect for family."

VIEWED AS A TRAITOR

Those similarities also ring true for Italian Americans such as Wilson and Nicole Ianieri, who teaches Italian language classes in Davis and Woodland.

"After the birth of my children (Miles in 1996 and Darius in 1998), I began to feel a very spiritual need," said Wilson, who converted in 1998. "If I don't pray five times a day, I get a little antsy. It's as if my whole day is out of whack." Wilson's wife and mother accept his change of faith. But Ianieri, 24, initially was viewed as a traitor.

Ianieri, whose father is an Italian immigrant, said she was raised "a very strong Catholic." Then, as a teenager, she befriended a Muslim youth from Egypt and became curious about Islam. A few years later, a college friend invited her to a mosque. "As soon as I walked in, I felt a sense of belonging, a sense of community that in all my years of going to church, I'd never felt. There were people from all over the world sharing the same goals, and it touched me."

Finally, during Ramadan, she broke the news to her parents. "They were really shocked initially, and who can blame them? They met me for lunch, which was kind of a bad choice, because I couldn't eat or drink anything, and I was wearing a scarf and, unfortunately, the cheapest material was black, and I'm all pale from not eating."

"My dad's words were, 'You're Italian. Italians are Catholic. You were born a Catholic, and you're going to die a Catholic.' ... My mom was crying."

Ianieri said she no longer was welcome to serve as vice president of her Italian cultural group. One association member, a relative, telephoned to say "I no longer represented the cultural values they wished to rep-

resent. Fifty years ago, in the village, what were women wearing? They were wearing long skirts and scarves, like me. They were moral."

Ianieri eventually married a Moroccan immigrant who has been embraced by her parents.

"Their biggest problem wasn't about the religion, but about the way I dress," she said. The hijab - worn by some Muslim women, but not others - can make life for young Muslims difficult in America.

PRESSURE TO DATE

Asma Ghori, 20, a UC Davis student from India, says high school dances and college nights out have been exercises in misery.

"I can't eat the food. I can't dance, because I don't dance in front of men. I can't dress the way other women dress. I don't drink, and I don't go with a date - what's the point?"

Ghori's friend Roohina Diwan, a pre-med student who emigrated from Afghanistan as young girl, said that in high school she was called a "scarf head," "turbanator" and other slurs. After the Oklahoma City bombing, she said, schoolmates asked her if she knew how to make bombs. But it's not just bigoted attitudes toward Muslims that bother Diwan.

"Every time you turn on the TV, the word sex comes up about a million times," she said. "In high school, I felt a lot of pressure to date and have a boyfriend."

At Davis, she has struggled with the drinking and mating habits of her non-Muslim friends and roommates. Because Muslim values so often clash with mainstream American behavior, Diwan identifies as Muslim - not American. Diwan has served as a spiritual guide for her friend, Thy Loun, who was born in Cambodia a Buddhist, then became a Christian before converting to Islam last April. Loun said she's traded nights of clubbing in mini-skirts for a hijab and the calmness that comes with daily prayer.

"When I have on the hijab, it makes me aware of what I do, and that I'm accountable for all my actions," she said. "I have an identity."

Loun and her husband, a Mexican American Catholic, are among many American Muslims struggling with the Quran's ban against usury, which holds that Muslims can't make a profit lending money. "Maybe we'll get an interest-free checking account," she said.

Jameela Houda Salem said her Egyptian husband refuses to buy life insurance because the Qur'an says it's sinful to profit off someone's death.

"That's one of my issues, because I'm a licensed insurance agent," said Salem, who was raised Jewish and Catholic by divorced parents in Brooklyn. "I have faith that God will provide for me, but I also want the \$250,000 (in the event of her husband's sudden death) to pay off the house."

"I'm working on the faith issue."

Salem, who said she studied 11 religions before converting to Islam last year, said it's been a little tough getting used to her husband's belief that "the man is the head of the household and he does have the last say."

"As an American woman who's been on her own for a number of years, I'm used to having my own say."

DAWAH (INVITATION) - OUR OBLIGATION

An important matter for Muslims to realize is that da'wah is an obligation upon them.

Allah says in the Quran:

"Invite to the Way of your Lord (i.e. Islam) with wisdom and fair preaching, and argue with them in a way that is better. Truly, your Lord knows best who has gone astray from His Path, and He is the Best Aware of those who are guided." [an-Nisaa' 16:125]

"Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining al-ma'roof [i.e. Islamic Monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do] and forbidding al-Munkar [polytheism and disbelief and all that Islam has forbidden]. And it is they who are successful." [Aal 'Imraan 3:104]

The second verse may seem to be restricting the general obligation given in the first verse, but a close look at the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) reveals that calling to Allah is an individual obligation, rather than a collective one.

The Prophet (pbuh) has said:

"Convey from me, even one verse." Conveying the message therefore does not require a high level of scholarship, it is in fact a responsibility of each and every Muslim, according to his or her ability.

The obligation is further emphasized by the following verse which explains that not conveying the message - hiding knowledge - is disobedience to Allah that causes Allah's curse to descend upon such people, which shows that such a sin leads to the Hellfire.

"Verily, those who conceal the clear proofs, evidences and the guidance, which We have sent down, after We have made it clear for the people in the book, they are the ones cursed by Allah and cursed by the cursers."

In the same connection, the Prophet (pbuh) has stated,

"Whoever hides knowledge, Allah will brand him with the branding iron from the hellfire. [Ahmad]

Calling people to Allah also means completing our own worship, the reason for which we are created.

It is one of the noblest acts that entails a high reward.

"And who is better in speech than he who invites to Allah and does righteous deeds, and says: 'I am one of the Muslims.'" [Fussilat 41:33]

With regards to the reward, the Prophet (pbuh) has said:

"Whoever guides [another] to a good deed will get a reward similar to the one who performs it." [Saheeh Muslim]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

"If you guarantee me six things on your part I shall guarantee you Paradise. Speak the truth when you talk, keep a promise when you make it, when you are trusted with something fulfil your trust, avoid sexual immorality, lower your eyes, and restrain your hands from injustice." [Bukhari]

WISDOM IN ISLAM

Wisdom In Islam encompasses in its radiant words the true goals that all of us must strive for. Its bounty of mercy, forgiveness and guidance is stunning in its clarity. Imagine using this wonderful guidance on a regular basis? It is important to endeavor to practice and then to invite others to practice these beautiful words of wisdom.

A Bedouin came one day to the Prophet Mohammed (SAW) and said to him, "O, Messenger of Allah! I've come to ask you a few questions about the affairs of this life and the Hereafter."

Ask what you wish.

I'd like to be the most learned of men.

Fear Allah, and you will be the most learned of men.

I wish to be the richest man in the world.

Be contented, and you will be the richest man in the world.

I'd like to be the most just of men.

Desire for others what you desire for yourself, and you will be the most just of men.

I want to be the best of men.

Do good to others and you will be the best of men.

I wish to be the most favored by Allah.

Engage much in Allah's praise, and you will be most favored by Him.

I'd like to complete my faith.

If you have good manners you will complete your faith.

I wish to be among those who do good.

Adore Allah as if you see Him. If you don't see Him, He sees you. In this way you will be among those who do good.

I wish to be obedient to Allah.

If you observe Allah's commands you will be obedient.

I'd like to be free from all sins.

Bathe yourself from impurities and you will be free from all sins.

I'd like to be raised on the Day of Judgment in the light.

Don't wrong yourself or any other creature, and you will be raised on the Day of Judgment in the light.

I'd like Allah to bestow His mercy on me.

If you have mercy on yourself and on others, Allah will grant you mercy on the Day of Judgment.

I'd like my sins to be very few.

If you seek the forgiveness of Allah as much as you can; your sins will be very few.

I'd like to be the most honorable man.

If you do not complain to any fellow creature, you will be the most honorable of men.

I'd like to be the strongest of men.

If you put your trust in Allah, you be the strongest of men.

I'd like to enlarge my provision.

If you keep yourself pure, Allah will enlarge your provision.

I'd like to be loved by Allah and His messenger.

If you love what Allah and His messenger love you will be among their beloved ones.

Stories Of The Sahabas



ABU HURAYRAH (RADIULAHU ANHU)

On the authority of Abu Hurayrah, may God be pleased with him who said: The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said...

Through this phrase millions of Muslims from the early history of Islam to the present have come to be familiar with the name Abu Hurayrah. In speeches and lectures, in Friday khutbahs and seminars, in the books of hadith and sirah, fiqh and ibadah.

Through his prodigious efforts, hundreds of ahadith or sayings of the Prophet were transmitted to later generations. No other person has narrated as many Ahadith as he has done. Ibn Jauzi has attributed as many as 5,374 Ahadith to him. His is the foremost name in the roll of hadith transmitters. Next to him comes the names of such companions as Abdullah the son of Umar, Anas the son of Malik, Umm al-Muminin Aishah, Jabir ibn Abdullah and Abu Said al-Khudri all of whom transmitted over a thousand sayings of the Prophet.

Abu Hurayrah became a Muslim at the hands of at-Tufayl ibn Amr the chieftain of the Daws tribe to which he belonged. The Daws lived in the region of Tihamah which stretches along the coast of the Red Sea in southern Arabia. When at-Tufayl returned to his village after meeting the Prophet and becoming a Muslim in the early years of his mission, Abu Hurayrah was one of the first to respond to his call. He was unlike the majority of the Daws who remained stubborn in their old beliefs for a long time.

When at-Tufayl visited Makkah again, Abu Hurayrah accompanied him. There he had the honor and privilege of meeting the noble Prophet who asked him: "What is your name?"

"Abdu Shams - Servant of a Sun," he replied.

"Instead, let it be Abdur-Rahman - the Servant of the Beneficent Lord," said the Prophet.

"Yes, Abdur-Rahman (it shall be) O Messenger of God," he replied. However, he continued to be known as Abu Hurayrah, "the kitten man", literally "the father of a kitten" because like the Prophet he was fond of cats and since his childhood often had a cat to play with.

Abu Hurayrah stayed in Tihamah for several years and it was only at the beginning of the seventh year of the Hijrah that he arrived in Madinah with others of his tribe. The Prophet had gone on a campaign to Khaybar. Being destitute, Abu Hurayrah took up his place in the Masjid with other of the Ahl as-Suffah. He was single, without wife or child. With him however was his mother who was still a mushrik (unbeliever). He longed, and prayed, for her to become a Muslim but she adamantly refused. One day, he invited her to have faith in God alone and follow His Prophet but she uttered some words about the Prophet which saddened him greatly. With tears in his eyes, he went to the noble Prophet who said to him:

"What makes you cry, O Abu Hurayrah?"

"I have not let up in inviting my mother to Islam but she has always rebuffed me. Today, I invited her again and I heard words from her which I do not like. Do make supplication to God Almighty to make the heart of Abu Hurayrah's mother incline to Islam."

The Prophet responded to Abu Hurayrah's request and prayed for his mother. Abu Hurayrah said: "I went home and found the door closed. I heard the splashing of water and when I tried to enter my mother said: 'Stay where you are, O Abu Hurayrah.' And after putting on her clothes, she said, 'Enter!' I entered and she said: 'I testify that there is no god but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is His Servant and His Messenger.'"

"I returned to the Prophet, peace be on him, weeping with joy just as an hour before I had gone weeping from sadness and said: 'I have good news, O Messenger of Allah. God has responded to your prayer and guided the mother of Abu Hurayrah to Islam.'"

Abu Hurayrah loved the Prophet a great deal and found favor with him. He was never tired of looking at the Prophet whose face appeared to him as having all the radiance of the sun and he was never tired of listening to him. Often he would praise God for his good fortune and say: "Praise be to God Who has guided Abu Hurayrah to Islam." Praise be to God Who has taught Abu Hurayrah the Quran."

"Praise be to God who has bestowed on Abu Hurayrah the companionship of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace." On reaching Madinah, Abu Hurayrah set his heart on attaining knowledge. Zayd ibn Thabit the notable companion of the Prophet reported: "While Abu Hurayrah and I and another friend of mine were in the Masjid praying to God Almighty and performing dhikr to Him, the Messenger of God appeared. He came towards us and sat among us. We became silent and he said: 'Carry on with what you were doing.'"

"So my friend and I made a supplication to God before Abu Hurayrah did and the Prophet began to say Ameen to our dua.

"Then Abu Hurayrah made a supplication saying: 'O Lord, I ask You for what my two companions have asked and I ask You for knowledge which will not be forgotten.'"

"The Prophet, peace be on him, said: 'Ameen.' We then said: 'And we ask Allah for knowledge which will not be forgotten, and the Prophet replied: 'The Daws youth has asked for this before you.'" With his formidable memory, Abu Hurayrah set out to memorize in the four years that he spent with the Prophet, the gems of wisdom that emanated from his lips. He realized that he had a great gift and he set about to use it to the full in the service of Islam.

He had free time at his disposal. Unlike many of the Muhajirin he did not busy himself in the market-places, with buying and selling. Unlike many of the Ansar, he had no land to cultivate nor crops to tend. He stayed with the Prophet in Madinah and went with him on journeys and expeditions.

Many companions were amazed at the number of hadith he had memorized and often questioned him on when he had heard a certain hadith and under what circumstances.

Once Marwan ibn al-Hakam wanted to test Abu Hurayrah's power of memory. He sat with him in one room and behind a curtain he placed a scribe, unknown to Abu Hurayrah, and ordered him

to write down whatever Abu Hurayrah said. A year later, Marwan called Abu Hurayrah again and asked him to recall the same ahadith which the scribe had recorded. It was found that he had forgotten not a single word.

Abu Hurayrah was concerned to teach and transmit the ahadith he had memorized and knowledge of Islam in general. It is reported that one day he passed through the suq (market) of Madinah and naturally saw people engrossed in the business of buying and selling.

"How feeble are you, O people of Madinah!" he said.

"What do you see that is feeble in us, Abu Hurayrah?" they asked.

"The inheritance of the Messenger of God, peace be on him, is being distributed and you remain here! Won't you go and take your portion?"

"Where is this, O Abu Hurayrah?" They asked.

"In the Masjid," he replied.

Quickly they left. Abu Hurayrah waited until they returned. When they saw him, they said: "O Abu Hurayrah, we went to the Masjid and entered and we did not see anything being distributed."

"Didn't you see anyone in the Masjid?" he asked.

"O yes, we saw some people performing Salat, some people reading the Quran and some people discussing about what is halal and what is haram."

"Woe unto you," replied Abu Hurayrah, "that is the inheritance of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace."

Abu Hurayrah underwent much hardship and difficulties as a result of his dedicated search for knowledge. He was often hungry and destitute. He said about himself:

"When I was afflicted with severe hunger, I would go to a companion of the Prophet and asked him about an ayah of the Quran and (stay with him) learning it so that he would take me with him to his house and give food."

One day, my hunger became so severe that I placed a stone on my stomach. I then sat down in the path of the companions. Abu Bakr passed by and I asked him about an ayah of the Book of God. I only asked him so that he would invite me but he didn't.

"Then Umar ibn al-Khattab passed by me and I asked him about an ayah but he also did not invite me. Then the Messenger of God, peace be on him, passed by and realized that I was hungry and said: "Abu Hurayrah!"

"At your command" I replied and followed him until we entered his house. He found a bowl of milk and asked his family: "From where did you get this?"

"Someone sent it to you" they replied.

He then said to me: "O Abu Hurayrah, go to the Ahl as-Suffah and invite them." Abu Hurayrah did as he was told and they all
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drank from the milk.

The time came of course when the Muslims were blessed with great wealth and material goodness of every description. Abu Hurayrah eventually got his share of wealth. He had a comfortable home, a wife and child. But this turn of fortune did not change his personality. Neither did he forget his days of destitution. He would "I grew up as an orphan and I emigrated as a poor and indigent person. I used to take food for my stomach from Busrah bint Ghazwan. I served people when they returned from journeys and led their camels when they set out. Then God caused me to marry her (Busrah). So praise be to God who has strengthened his religion and made Abu Hurayrah an imam." (This last statement is a reference to the time when he became governor of Madinah.)

Much of Abu Hurayrah's time would be spent in spiritual exercises and devotion to God. Qiyam al-Layl (staying up for the night in prayer and devotion) was a regular practice of his family including his wife and his daughter. He would stay up for a third of the night, his wife for another third and his daughter for a third. In this way, in the house of Abu Hurayrah no hour of the night would pass without ibadah, dhikr and Salat.

During the caliphate of Umar, Umar appointed him as governor of Bakrain. Umar was very scrupulous about the type of persons whom he appointed as governors. He was always concerned that his governors should live simply and frugally and not acquire much wealth even though this was through lawful means.

In Bahrain, Abu Hurayrah became quite rich. Umar heard of this and recalled him to Madinah. Umar thought he had acquired his wealth through unlawful means and questioned him about where and how he had acquired such a fortune. Abu Hurayrah replied: "From breeding horses and gifts which I received." "Hand it over to the treasury of the Muslims," ordered Umar.

Abu Hurayrah did as he was told and raised his hands to the heavens and prayed: "O Lord, forgive the Amir al-Muminin." Subsequently, Umar asked him to become governor once again but he declined. Umar asked him why he refused and he said: "So that my honor would not be besmirched, my wealth taken and my back beaten."

And he added: "And I fear to judge without knowledge and speak without wisdom."

Throughout his life Abu Hurayrah remained kind and courteous to his mother. Whenever he wanted to leave home, he would stand at the door of her room and say: As-salaamu alaykum, yaa ummataah, wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu, peace be on you, mother, and the mercy and blessings of God." She would reply: "Wa alayka-s salaam, yaa bunayya, wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu - And on you be peace, my son, and the mercy and blessings of God." Often, he would also say: "May God have mercy on you as you cared for me when I was small," and she would reply: "May God have mercy on you as you delivered me from error when I was old."

One day he saw two men walking together, one older than the other. He asked the younger one: "What is this man to you?" "My father," the person replied. "Don't call him by his name. Don't walk in front of him and don't sit before him," advised Abu Hurayrah.

Muslims owe a debt of gratitude to Abu Hurayrah for helping to preserve and transmit the valuable legacy of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace. He died in the year 59 AH when he was seventy-eight years old.

EVENTS FORETOLD IN THE QURAN

PRESENCE OF MORE THAN ONE WORLD

**“Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.”
(Quran 1:1)**

This is the first verse of the opening chapter of the Holy Quran. 1400 years ago, the human mind was incapable of any sound thinking about the earth, the solar system or the galaxies. Yet the Quran is testifying to the presence of ‘worlds’ beyond the earth. The words ‘Lord of the worlds’ appear 73 times in the Quran. Today, mankind knows for a fact there are other planets besides earth. This is known through invention of telescopes and other scientific developments. But the Almighty revealed this knowledge to Muhammad (pbuh) long before man invented the telescope and other similar inventions.

ORIGIN OF THE UNIVERSE AS ONE ENTITY

**“Have they not who disbelieve seen that the heavens and earth were joined together (as one piece), and then We parted them.”
(Quran 21:30)**

This Quranic verse has explained a mystery that was unknown to the greatest physicists and astronauts for centuries. The verse reveals that the heavens and earth at the beginning were joined together, and then they were separated. Recent advancements in astronomy especially the Big Bang theory of the creation of the universe support this Quranic statement. The Big Bang theory says that about 20,000,000,000 years ago (...that’s quite a bit...) the universe began with an explosive expansion of a single extremely condensed state of matter. The Nobel Prize for science in 1977 was awarded for this discovery, whereas the Holy Quran solved this mystery centuries ago.



DETAIL BY FINGERPRINTS

**“Does man think We (Allah) cannot assemble his bones? No, We are able to put together in perfect order (even) the very tips of his fingers.”
(Quran 75:3-4)**

It is now an established fact that each human being has his own unique fingerprint. The difference between fingerprints of individuals is so specific and subtle that only experts with sophisticated instruments can identify them. ‘Fingerprints provide one of the oldest and most accepted forms of personal verification; no two finger-

prints ever have been found to be the same. The use of fingerprints is accurate, reliable, convenient, and unobtrusive’. (Bio centric Solutions, Inc.) It is another miracle of the Holy Quran that it stated this fact long before the human mind could even conceive it.

THE SOURCE OF MILK

“Verily in cattle, there is lesson for you. We give you to drink of what is inside their bellies coming from a conjunction between the contents of the intestine and blood, a milk, pure and pleasant for those who drink it.” (Quran 16:66)

The Quran here describes the biological process in the mammals, which brings together the contents of the intestine and the blood at the level of the intestine wall (digestion and absorption) which produces milk. This is in perfect harmony with recent discoveries made in the physiology of the digestive system of mammals. Such minute and specific knowledge was totally unknown to mankind at the time when the Quran was revealed to Muhammad (pbuh).



THE CURE OF HONEY

“And your Lord inspired the bee... There comes from their bellies, a drink of varying colors wherein is healing for men, in this is indeed a sign for the people who think.” (Quran 16:68-69)

In recent years, scientific evidence is beginning to emerge which confirms the beneficial effects of honey in certain medical and surgical conditions. Dr. John Heinerman, in his book ‘Nature’s Super 7’, discusses a study done at the Nes Ziona Biological Institute, in Tel Aviv, where they proved conclusively that treatment of open wounds with honey helped prevent infection and speed healing. Dr. Avshalom Mizrahi, the microbiologist who led the research team, noted, honey contains, aside from sugars, ingredients with properties similar to those of antibiotics. Dr. Heinerman, an internationally renowned medical anthropologist, goes on to say that honey is one of the strongest antibacterial agents found in nature.

As more research studies are conducted, we will likely see more amazing uses of honey. So far researchers are examining the benefits of honey for yeast infections, wounds, sore throats, peptic ulcers, and diarrhea. How amazing it is that the Quran clearly stated the cure in honey 1400 years ago when science has only discovered it now!

PROCESS OF FERTILIZATION BY WIND

“It is We Who send the fertilizing winds, then We send down water from the sky, and then We give it to you to drink, you are not the one who would store of this wealth.”

(Quran 15:22)

Wind is one of the most effective means of spreading pollens, thereby causing fertilization in plants. This again is one of the recent discoveries in botany. Allah (swt), however, revealed this information in His book long before the modern-day botanists could discover it.

EXISTENCE OF GENDER IN ALL PLANTS

“He created the heavens without any pillars that you can see; We sent down rain from the sky, and produced on the earth every kind of noble species in pairs.”

(Quran 31:10)

“Glory to Allah, Who created in pairs all things that the earth produces.”

(Quran 36:36)

These verses (amongst others) clearly declare the presence of gender in the plants. Botanists discovered this fact only 100 years ago. Muhammad (pbuh) is not an expert botanist. It is obvious that this information was revealed by Almighty God to Muhammad (pbuh).

SEA WAVES

“(The unbelievers’ state) is like a vast deep ocean, overwhelmed with waves, one over the other, and above it is a cloud of darkness upon darkness, one above another; if a man stretches out his hand, he can hardly see it.” (Quran 24:40)

One should note that the verse describes the state of Deep Ocean as consisting of great waves topped by other great waves one above the other. Mankind saw this phenomenon after the invention of the submarine. The first nuclear submarine became a reality in 1954 and the mystery of the deep seawaves were observed for the first time. Who besides Allah has given this deep-sea information to Muhammad (pbuh)?

MIXING OF THE RIVER AND SEA WATERS

“It is He (Allah) Who has let loose the two bodies of flowing waters, one palatable and sweet, and the other saltish and bitter; yet He has made a barrier between them, and this is an insurmountable barrier.”

(Quran 25:53)

The verse is describing the phenomenon of the mixing of river water with seawater. The two kinds of water look alike, but the river water is sweet and palatable, whereas, the seawater is saltish and bitter. Additionally, no human being can draw the fine line of partition between these waters. This verse is another reminder that the Holy Quran is divine in its nature.

CREATION OF MAN

“We created man from an extract of clay. Then We placed him as a drop in a place of rest. Then we made the drop into a leech-like structure. Then of that leech-like structure we made a chewed lump. Then we made out of the chewed lump, bones, and clothed the bones in flesh.”

(Quran 23:12-14)

The above is the detailed and accurate description of the stages of the creation of man in the womb of the mother. This is proven and supported by the latest modern scientific evidence and corroborated by the highest authorities in the field of embryology. This is one of the greatest proofs that the Quran is the word of God. Dr. Keith Moore, one of the world’s most prominent scientists in the fields of anatomy and embryology and professor of anatomy at Toronto University in Canada states:

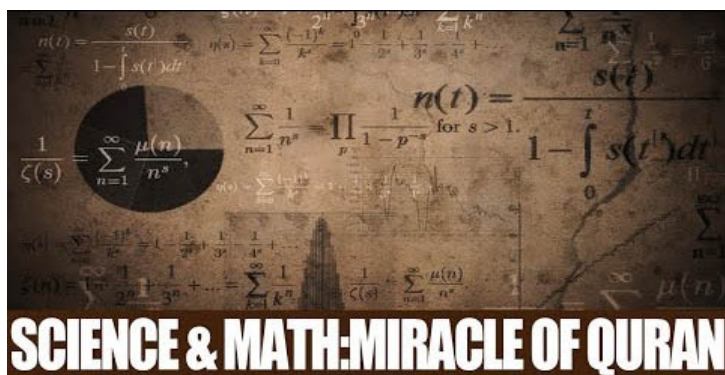
“It has been a great pleasure for me to help clarify statements in the Quran about human development. It is clear to me that these statements must have come to Muhammad from God, because almost all of this knowledge was not discovered until many centuries later. This proves to me that Muhammad must have been a messenger of God.” He was then asked: **“...Does this mean that you believe that the Quran is the word of God?”** He replied **“...I find no difficulty in accepting this.”**

The most pleasing to Allah of all actions is that which is done continuously though it may be small. (al-Bukhari)

MATH IN THE QURAN

Dr. Tariq Al Suwaidan discovered some verses in the Holy Quran that mention one thing is equal to another. See below for some astonishing results:

- 24 - Al Rajul (Man)
- 24 - Al Mar' ha (Woman)
- 115 - Al Dunia (This Life)
- 115 - Al Aakhirat (The Hereafter)
- 88 - Al Malaika (The Angels)
- 88 - Al Shayteen (The Satans)
- 145 - Life
- 145 - Death
- 11 - Iblis (King of Devils)
- 11 - Seek refuge from Iblis



And amazingly enough look how many times the following words appear:

5 Salat (Prayer)

12 Al-Shahr (Month)

365 Al-Yahom (Day)

32 Sea

13 Land

Sea + Land = 32 + 13 = 45

% Sea 32 / 45 * 100 71.11111111%

+

28.88888889%

% Land 13 / 45 * 100 = 100.00%

Modern Science has only recently proven that the water covers 71.111% of the earth, while the land covers 28.889%.

The Miracles of the Quran will never end. There will never be a time where mankind can fully take in the knowledge that is in this holy book. It is a treasure of which guides those that want to succeed in this life and the hereafter.

LETTER FROM MECCA

Following Are Excerpts From a Letter by Malcolm X After His First Pilgrimage

America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and even eaten with people who in America would have been considered 'white'-but the 'white' attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color.



Never have I witnessed such overwhelming spirit of hospitality and the true brotherhood as is practiced by people of all colors and races here in this Ancient Holy Land, the home of Abraham, Muhammad, and all the other Prophets of the Holy Scriptures. For the past week, I have been utterly speechless and spellbound by the graciousness I see displayed all around me by people of all colors.

There were tens of thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world. They were of all colors, from blue-eyed blonds to black skinned Africans. But we were all participating in the same ritual displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe never could exist between the white and the non-white.

You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to rearrange much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions. This was not too difficult for me. Despite my firm convictions, I have been always a man who tries to face facts, and to accept the reality of life as new experience and new knowledge unfolds it. I have always kept an open mind, which is necessary to the flexibility that must go hand in hand with every form of intelligent search for truth. During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept in the same bed (or on the same rug-while praying to the same God-with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was die blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of 'white'. And in the words and in the actions and in the deeds of the 'white' Muslims, I felt the same sincerity that I felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan, and Ghana...

We were truly all the same (brothers)-because their belief one God had removed the 'white' from their minds, the 'white' from their behavior, and the 'white' from their attitude. I could see from this, that perhaps if white Americans could accept the Oneness of God, then perhaps, too, in reality the Oneness of Man-and cease to measure, and hinder, and harm others in terms of their 'differences' in color.

With racism plaguing America like an incurable cancer, the so-called 'Christian' white American heart should be more receptive to a proven solution to such a destructive problem.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all the Worlds.

Sincerely,

El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz (Malcolm X)

WHY I EMBRACED ISLAM

Noor Al-Malaikah Freeland

"Sister, who is your Lord and Savior-do you not fear the hellfire?!" A fat man in a blue suit charged with spittle on his chin as he waved his Bible enthusiastically outside the West Florida Regional Public Library. "You're gonna be in Heaven, right?" I asked, my practiced reply in mind. And upon his immediate affirmative came my cheeky retort, "Well then, Hell doesn't sound so bad to me."

Growing up in the "Bible-belt" provided lots of opportunity for self-proclaimed atheists and agnostics (my friends and I) to spar with so-called "bible-beaters" like this man. We had great disdain for organized religion and its members; people who willingly submitted to theology and took the roles of brainless sheep. They accepted anything a preacher said as fact with no more substantial evidence than their own faith and no required thought.

My cohorts and I (to the best of my knowledge) had no more understanding of the "f" word than we had of the purple/green gloop served on Wednesdays in our school cafeteria. But through all our joking, sarcastic remarks, and even our disdain, I had a deep dark secret: I wanted to believe in God and my lack of faith scared me to death.

I sat in church every Sunday, listening and waiting for Jesus (PBUH) to "enter my heart" (astaghfirallah). I wanted the understanding and the blind faith that I saw in the people around me. But it never came. When I read the Bible, I felt sickness inside. It held no more truth than an interesting novel. I could not pray in the name of Jesus (PBUH) for Jesus (PBUH) was a man. He ate as a man, spoke as a man, slept as a man and he accomplished miracles only in the name of God. I wanted to pray in the name of God. Christians seemed to worship a God who was no more than a man, no more superior than a king.

Soon, all my hope once again became disdain. As I looked at mankind, this disdain took the form of despair. I disparaged our very existence and a hideous kind of cynicism captured my sick heart. People are utterly selfish-without honor. We are "civilized" dogs. Snapping and pissing and accomplishing nothing except perhaps to produce more of ourselves. We are faithless beings without any true loyalty and hypocrites in every right. We deserve nothing which we own, and yet we truly own nothing.

Shakespeare said it best when he called us clumsy untrained actors flailing around on the stage of life. I didn't know what came after death, but whatever horror it could be-it was nothing a human didn't deserve.

The fat man's eyes widened and he pointed a crooked finger at me as he said, "Sister, HELL is no joke! Jesus is-" Something snapped deep inside me and I felt hysteria rise in my throat as ignoring all on-lookers and passer-bys-I screamed, "WHO IS JESUS!!?"

At this point the man got a knowing (okay, condescending) look on his face as he launched into the all too familiar "vapor, solid, liquid" analogy.

I immediately interrupted him, beyond myself with ire, "Do NOT tell me that Jesus (a human!) is to God as ice is to water vapor!" I stood up and spread my arms apart in appeal, "we are creations of God and Jesus was like US! We lay no claim to perfection except our own knowledge of its existence. Look around you! Look inside you! Look at your own ugliness! Ask yourself how God can be anything like you-How can you be anything like GOD!!!"

Tears were now streaming down my face and I was shaking as four or five people stared in shocked silence. "The only goodness we have comes from God but we continue to succor evil. You worship a man and you

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worship yourself. SURELY, if there is a Hell, you will burn in it for all your "knowledge" of God!"

It took less than a moment for me to regret these words, thrown like stones in anger. However, today I do recognize their utmost importance in my life. As I looked around me that day, I saw many strange faces, all displaying varying degrees of reaction to my tirade. One face, in particular, was marked by grave interest and... curiosity. The man had dark Arab features and a long graying beard. In a moment, he approached me and said, "I want to show you something."

I followed him into the library; we walked amid countless shelves of human "wisdom." In silence, we reached the area marked "600's-religion and philosophy." He searched a moment and then proceeded to hand me a book entitled, *The Noble Qur'an*. It had a translator but no author. "Read this," he said, "and find peace because Sister you are Muslim." I read the Qur'an in less than a day and then I read it again. I felt the first stirrings of true trust in my life. For me, this volume answered every mystery I cared to question.

One of the great guiding principles of Islam is that the believer should tread a path between fear and hope. He should not take it for granted that he will enter Paradise, because this will make him complacent, and he does not know in what state he will die. Nor should he assume that he is going to Hell, because this is despairing of the mercy of Allaah, which is forbidden. So the believer does righteous deeds, and hopes that Allaah will reward him for them, and he avoids evil deeds out of fear of the punishment of Allaah. If he commits a sin, he repents in order to gain forgiveness and protect himself from the punishment of Hell.

Allaah forgives all sins and accepts the repentance of those who repent. If a believer fears that the good deeds he has sent on before him are not enough, as you suggest, then he will increase his efforts, in fear and hope. No matter how many righteous deeds he has sent on before him, he cannot rely on them and take them for granted, or else he will be doomed. He keeps striving and hoping for reward, and at the same time he fears lest his deeds be contaminated with any element of showing off, self-admiration, or anything that will lead to them being rejected by Allaah. Allaah describes the believers (interpretation of the meaning):

"...those who give that (their charity) which they give (and also do other good deeds) with their hearts full of fear (whether their alms and charity, etc.) have been accepted or not), because they are sure to return to their Lord (for reckoning)." [al-Mu'minoon 23:60]

So the believer keeps on striving, fearing, and hoping, until he meets his Lord, believing in Tawheed (Divine Unity) and doing righteous deeds, and earns the pleasure of his Lord and Paradise. If you think about the matter, you will realize that these are the right motives for action, and that righteousness cannot be achieved in this life in any other way.

As regards to what Christians say about original sin, this matter needs to be approached from several angles.

Firstly: The Islamic belief concerning human sin is: the individual bears the responsibility for his own sin; no one else should bear this burden for him, nor should he bear the burden for anyone else. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): "And no bearer of burdens shall bear another's burden..." [Faahir 35:18] This refutes the idea of original sin. If the father commits a sin, what fault is that of his children and grandchildren? Why should they bear the burden of a sin that someone else committed? The Christian belief that the descendants should bear the sin of their father is the essence of injustice. How can any sane person say that the sin should be carried down the centuries by all of humanity, or that the children, grandchildren, and subsequent descendants should be tainted because of their father's sin?

Secondly, making mistakes is a part of human nature. Our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, "Every son of Aadam is bound to commit sins" (reported by al-Tirmidhi, 2423), but Allaah has not left man unable to do anything about the mistakes that he makes. He gives man the opportunity to repent, and so the hadeeth (words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) quoted above concludes: "...and the best of those who commit sins are those who repent." The mercy of Allaah is clear in the teachings of Islam, as Allaah calls His servants (interpretation of the meaning):

"Say, 'O My servants who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allaah, verily Allaah forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.'" [al-Zumar 39:53]

This is human nature, and this is the solution to the problem of sin. But to make this human nature, which is bound to make mistakes, a barrier between the servant and his Lord which will prevent him from ever earning the pleasure of God, and to say that the only way to reach God is through His sending His (so-called) son down to earth to be humiliated and crucified while his father looks on, so that mankind could be forgiven, is an extremely odd idea. Just describing it sounds so unlikely that there is no longer any need to refute it in detail. Once, when discussing this issue with a Christian, I said, "If you say that God sent down His son to be crucified to atone for the sins of the people alive at his time and afterwards, what about those who had come before and died as sinners before the time of Christ, and had no opportunity to know about him and believe in the Crucifixion so that their sins might be forgiven?" All he could say was: "No doubt our priests have an answer to that!" Even if they do have an answer, it is bound to be concocted. There is no real answer.

If you really examine the Christian teaching on human sin with an open mind, you will see that they say that God sacrificed His only son to atone for the sins of mankind, and that this son was a god. If it was true that he was a god who was beaten, insulted and crucified, and died, then this doctrine contains elements of blasphemy because it accuses God of weakness and helplessness. Is God really incapable of forgiving the sins of all His servants with just one word? If He is Able to do all things (and the Christians do not dispute this fact), then why would He need to sacrifice His son in order to achieve the same thing? (Glorified and exalted be He far above what the wrongdoers say about Him!)

"He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth. How can He have children when He has no wife? He created all things and He is the All-Knower of everything." [al-An'aam 6:101 - interpretation of the meaning]

An ordinary man would not accept anyone harming his child; he would come to his defense, and would never hand him over to an enemy who would insult him, let alone leave him to face the worst kind of death. If this is the attitude of a mere created being, what then of the Creator?

Thirdly, the Christian doctrine of original sin has a negative effect because, as you have mentioned, it does not require any duties of man other than to believe that God sent His son to this earth to be crucified and to die to atone for the sins of mankind. Thus a person becomes a Christian and is to earn the pleasure of God and be admitted to heaven. Moreover, the Christian believes that everything that happened to the son of God was only to atone for his sins, past present and future, so there is no need to wonder why Christian societies have seen such an increase in murder, rape, robbery, alcoholism and other problems. After all, did not Christ die to atone for their sins, and haven't their sins been wiped out, so why should they stop doing these things? Tell me, by your Lord, why do you sometimes execute murderers, or put criminals in jail, or punish them in other ways, if you believe that the criminal's sins have all be atoned for and forgiven through the blood of Christ? Is this not a strange contradiction?

The faults in the behavior of some modern Muslims cannot be blamed on

Islam; those faults are the result of going against Islamic teachings. It is not fair to blame the religion for the faults of some of its adherents who have gone against it or gone astray. Are Muslims not being more just than Christians when they affirm that the sinner is threatened with the punishment of Allaah unless he repents, and that for some sins there is a deterrent, a punishment to be carried out in this world as an expiation for the Hereafter, as in the case of the punishments for murder, theft, fornication/adultery, etc.?

The key to Islam is no more than two simple phrases: "Ash-hadu an laa ilaaha ill-Allaah wa anna Muhammadan Rasool-Allaah (I bear witness that there is no god except Allaah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allaah)." With these few words, a person enters Islam in a matter of seconds. There is no need for baptism or priests, or even to go to a certain place such as a mosque or anywhere else. Compare this with the ridiculous procedures of baptism which the Christians do when they want to admit someone to the Church. Then there is the fact that the Christians venerate the cross on which Jesus was tortured and crucified in great pain - as they claim. They take it as a sacred object of blessing and healing, instead of scorning it and hating it as a symbol of oppression and the worst possible way for the son of God to die!

Do you not see that the Muslims are closer than others to the truth, because they believe in all the Prophets and Messengers, respecting them all and recognizing that all of them taught the truth of Divine Unity (Tawheed) and that each of them was appointed by Allaah and sent to his people with laws that were appropriate to the time and place? When the fair-minded Christian sees the followers of Islam believing in Musa (Moses), 'Eesaa (Jesus), and Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and in the original Torah and Gospel, as well as the Qur'aan, and sees his own people denying the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and rejecting the Qur'aan, wouldn't his open-mindedness make him think that the Muslims are most likely to be right?

Christians say that the Messiah said, "No one comes to the Father except through me". We need, first of all, to be sure that these words can truly be attributed to Jesus. Secondly, this is clearly not true. How then could mankind have known God at the times of Nooh (Noah), Hood, Saalih, Yoonus (Jonah), Shu'ayb (Jethro), Ibraaheem (Abraham), Musa (Moses) and other Prophets? If you were to say that during the time of Jesus (upon whom be peace) and up to the time of the Final Prophet, Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) the Children of Israel had no other way to know the religion of Allaah except through the way of Jesus, this would be correct.

Finally, the quote the Messiah as saying, "I and the Father are one". This is clearly not correct. If we examine the matter objectively, without letting our own desires get in the way, it becomes clear that the conjunction "and" in the phrase "I and the Father" implies that two separate entities are involved. "I" is one entity, and "the Father" is another. If you say, "So-and-so and I", it is obvious to any rational person that they are two separate people. The equation $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$ makes no sense to any rational person, whether he is a mathematician or not.

Something "geographic" Muslims take for granted that every "revert" exults is the absolute beauty of the Qur'an's honesty. It is bittersweet in its reality. As a Muslim, I now understand faith is not something you can acquire. Everyone has some degree of faith that may either grow and bloom or atrophy and rot. I could be angry at Christians my whole life, judging them for everything they don't see. I could despair at mankind and its inhumanity. I could rage at every Muslim who turns from the straight path. But I know, the wrath of Allah (SWT) is just-my knowledge is infantile. Who am I to know what is truth beyond what is written in my own heart as fact. I have now commenced my journey to peace which some may say started one cool spring afternoon outside of a public library. But I know better. I started this quest in my own heart the day I was born and I will continue until my death. I will strive (inshallah) to keep Allah (SWT) always in my heart and faith that is strong. And I no longer have disdain for those that attempt the same.

EATING TOGETHER

SUNNAHS OF EATING



During the month of Ramadan Muslims get together to share the bounties of Allah by taking their meals together. But when Ramadan is over we should not forget the many blessings and advantages in this. For one thing, we get more barakah (blessings) from the meal - when we eat together.

In one hadith of the Prophet (SAW), some of his companions complained that they ate but were not satisfied. The Prophet (S) said, "Perhaps you eat separately." They said, "Yes." He said, "If you gather together and mention Allah's name, you will be blessed in it." (Abu Dawud)

In addition, to share our meals with others is to follow the example of the Prophet (SAW) who regularly took meals with other people. The Sunnah is to share meals with people regardless of their wealth or status. This is because accepting invitations builds good feelings among people and increases love between the Muslims.

Islamic etiquette of eating together is more than subjective rituals or traditional 'table manners'. The purpose of the Sunnah in this case is remembrance of Allah, modesty, and consideration of others.

According to one hadith, "I was a boy under the care of Allah's Apostle and my hand used to go around the dish while I was eating. So the Prophet (SAW) said to me, -O boy! Mention the Name of Allah (Bismillah) and eat with your right hand, and eat of the dish what is nearer to you." Since then I have applied those instructions when eating." (Bukhari)

By eating what is near you, you are not picking around the plate to pluck out the choicest morsels for yourself, thereby depriving your fellow eaters (though we know from other hadiths that you may do so if you know they do not mind. (Bukhari)

In another hadith, the Prophet (SAW) said, "Do not take two pieces at a time without your companions consent." The Prophet said, "If the Iqama (call to prayer) for ('Isha) prayer is proclaimed and supper is served, take your supper first." (Bukhari)

You don't want to be distracted thinking about the food while praying.

The one serving the food should pass and drink to the right, and take for himself last. Also, when taking a meal at someone else's home, we should take care not to overstay our welcome, as is says in the Qur'an:

"O ye who Believe! Enter not the Prophet's houses until leave is given you for a meal (and then) not (so early) as to wait for its preparation: but when ye are invited enter; and when ye have taken your meal disperse without seeking familiar talk." (Quran 33:53)

Finally, do not forget to pray for your host. All of these guidelines from the Sunnah are based on the principles of generosity, modesty, and remembrance of Allah.

FASTING

"O you who believe, fasting is made obligatory on you as it was made for those before you, so that you may achieve Taqwa (God Consciousness). (Fasting) for a fixed number of days; but if any of you is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed number (should be made up) from days later. For those who can do it (with hardship), is a ransom, the feeding of one that is indigent. But he that will give more, of his own free will, -it is better for him. And it is better for you that ye fast, if ye only knew."



Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur'an, as a guide to mankind, also clear (signs) for guidance and judgement (between right and wrong). So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting, but if any one is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed period (should be made up) by days later.

God intends every facility for you; He does not want to put to difficulties. (He wants you) to complete the prescribed period, and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and that you must magnify Allah."

[Holy Qur'an 2:183-185]

THE MIRACLE OF THE ANT

By Harun Yahya

On his way to school every day, Joseph walks over to the garden of the house across the street and waits there for a while. A very special friend of his lives in this garden. No one knows this friend, but Joseph loves him a lot. Joseph never forgets to visit his friend, and enjoys their friendship a lot.

After all, he has a friend who is more intelligent than anyone else. Despite being very small in size, his friend can do many important things. He is also very hard-working. He does all of his jobs very well and at the proper time, just as if he was a soldier in an army. Although he does not go to school like Joseph, he successfully carries out the many tasks which he needs to do in his life. You are wondering who this little friend is, aren't you?

Joseph's secret friend is a little ant, who can do many wonderful things. You may never have heard how skilful and intelligent ants are. Some of you may even think of them as simple insects that wander around all day without doing anything. But those of you who think like that are mistaken, because ants, just like many other living things, also have a life of their own.

Ant families are very big. For instance, you probably have a family of 4-5 people. In an ant family, however, there are sometimes millions of ants. Now think for a minute: if you had millions of brothers and sisters, would you be able to live in a single house? Surely not!

The astonishing features of ants do not end here. Despite the fact that millions of them live together, they have no problems with each other, no mix-ups and no disorder. They live an extremely well planned life with everyone obeying the rules.

Some ant families do tailoring, others grow their own food like farmers, and yet others run small farms where they raise some smaller animals. In the same way as human beings breed cows and use their milk, ants breed small plant lice (aphids) and use their milk.

Weaver ants are skilful tailors. They combine leaves by pulling them from two sides and sewing the leaves together. In this way, they make a nice home for themselves.

Joseph: I first noticed him when I saw his tiny head emerging from the earth. His head attracted my attention, as it was a bit bigger than his body. I wondered why his head was like that and started to watch this tiny friend of mine. The big head on his little body was helping him serve as a guard at the entrance of the nest. Do you want to know 'how?' He was checking whether the ants that attempted to enter the nest belonged to his own family or not, and did not let them in if they were strangers.

Soon after seeing him, I met him and asked him to tell me what was happening inside. My little friend understood my curiosity, and started to tell me about it. What I was wondering most was how the ants with big heads recognized their nest-mates and let them in. ...and these are my hard-working friends.

The Ant: Joseph, let me first tell you that we call our families a 'colony.' In other words, we live in communities called colonies. An ant can easily tell whether another ant belongs to its own colony or not. He does it by touching the other ant's body with his antenna, (thin little rods coming out of the top of his head) which helps him to distinguish strangers, thanks to the 'colony scent' they have. If the ant is a stranger, then we cannot let him into our home. Moreover, we may even have to use force to send him away.

Ants do not want strangers to enter their nests, because this will threaten their security. They never hesitate to get into a fight to protect their nest and friends.

Joseph was surprised to hear about their perfect security system and wondered how strangers that tried to enter the nest dared to do so. When he shared this thought with his friend, he smiled at him and said that there were many other things that would surprise him.

The Ant then said: "Let me tell now you about the inside of our nest, which you were eager to know about. Our colonies consist of the queen

ant, male ants, soldiers, and worker ants.

The queen and male ants keep our species going. The queen is larger than all of us. The duty of the males is to make the queen give birth to new ants. Soldiers are responsible for protecting our colony, hunting, and finding new places for nests. The last group consists of the worker ants. Worker ants are all sterile female ants. That is, they cannot give birth to new ants. They take care of the queen and her babies, and clean and feed them.

In addition, they also have to do all the other jobs in the colony. They build new corridors in the nest, search for food, and clean the nest up. The worker and soldier ants also divide into smaller groups among themselves. Some of these are breeders, builders, and food-hunters. Each group has a different job. While one group fights off enemies or hunts, another group builds the nest, and yet another takes care of the cleaning and repairs of the nest."

As Joseph's little friend explained all that, he listened to him with wonder, and then asked him: "Do you never get bored, waiting at the entrance of the nest all the time? What is your duty in the nest?"

The Ant replied: "I am also a worker, and my duty is to serve here as a doorman. As you see, my head is big enough to cover the entrance hole of the nest. I am pleased that I have this ability, and I carry out my duty with great pleasure. I never get bored; on the contrary, I am very glad that I protect friends from threats."

Joseph couldn't help but be amazed at his answer. Ants were working all the time to help others, with no thought for them selves and without any problems-something even people cannot manage most of the time.

From what his little friend told him, he could easily understand that the work of the nest was perfectly divided up between the ants. It was obvious that the life of ants was very well-ordered and all the ants had to be quite unselfish. Then he wondered whether they had any fight amongst themselves because some of them claimed that they were better or stronger than others. His friend said that nothing like that ever happened and added:

"We are a big family, Joseph. There is no jealousy, competition, or ambition among us. We always help each other and do our best to serve the colony. Everything in the colony is based on sacrifice. Each ant thinks of the good of his friends first, and only then of himself."

Let me give you an example. When there is a shortage of food in the colony, the worker ants immediately change into 'feeder' ants, and start feeding others with the food in their reserve stomachs. When there is enough food in the colony, they again become worker ants. I used to hear people saying that there is competition among living things in nature. Never believe what they say. We know very well that we have to cooperate to be successful."

Joseph said that what he had told him about himself and his colony was a very good example of this. He was very glad to know that God had created him so unselfish, helpful and so fond of his friends. After what he told him, he decided to be at least as thoughtful of others as ants were, and be a good person whom God loves.

When mentioning the bees who have a social order similar to that of the ants, Allah states in the Qur'an that this social order has been "revealed" to them:

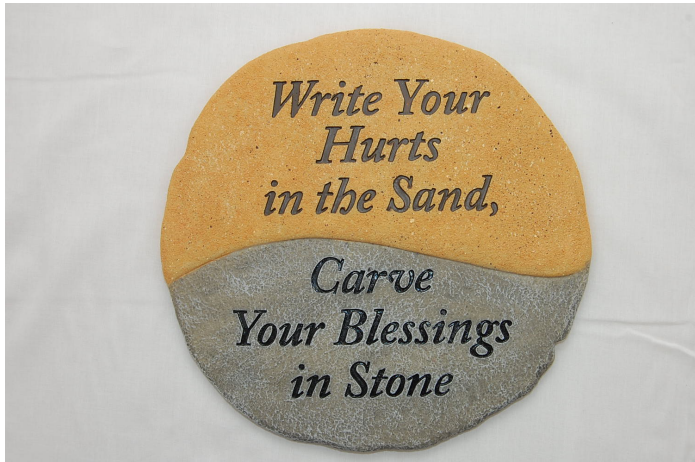
"And your Lord revealed to the bee: 'Build dwellings in the mountains and the trees and also in the structures which men erect. Then eat from every kind of fruit and travel the paths of your Lord, which have been made easy for you to follow.' From inside them comes a drink of varying colors, containing healing for mankind. There is certainly a sign in that for people who reflect." (an-Nahl: 68-69)

The verse conveys the message that everything the honey bees do is governed by a "revelation" Allah has given to them. Accordingly, all the "homes", that is, hives - and therefore the entire social order in these hives - and all the work they perform to make honey, are made possible by an inspiration Allah has given them.

When we look at ants, we see that things are no different for them either. Allah has inspired in them a social order also and they abide by it absolutely. This is the reason why each group of ant performs the duty assigned to it perfectly with absolute self-surrender and does not strive for more.

SAND AND STONE

A story tells that two friends were walking through the desert, at a specific point of the journey, they had an argument, and one of them slapped the other one in the face. The one, who got slapped, was hurt but without anything to say he wrote in the sand:



"Today, my best friend slapped me in the face."

They kept on walking until they found an oasis where they decided to take a bath. The one who got slapped and hurt started drowning and the other friend saved him. When he recovered from the fright, he wrote on a stone:

"Today my best friend saved my life."

The friend who saved and slapped his best friend asked him, "Why after I hurt you, you wrote in the sand, and now you write on a stone?"

The other friend, smiling, replied:

"When a friend hurts us, we should write it down in the sand, where the winds of forgiveness get in charge of erasing it away, and when something great happens, we should engrave it in the stone of the memory of the heart, where no wind can erase it."

Learn to write in the sand.

"A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out."

ALGERIAN SOUP-CHORBA

Ingredients: - 2 pounds of Lamb (or Chicken, or Beef)

- 7 Tomatoes (blended) or 2 table spoons of paste

- ½ cup of garbanzo beans

- 1 Tablespoon of Oil

- 1 Onion (chopped)

- 1 Carrot

- 1 Zucchini

- ¼ cup chopped Cilantro

- ½ cup chopped Parsley

- ¼ teaspoon of Black Pepper

- ¼ teaspoon of Cinnamon

- ½ cup of Orzo pasta or another soup Pasta



Algerian Soup
Chorba

Preparation:

1. Wash, slice, and puree the tomatoes.

2. Cut the meat in 1 inch cubes.

3. Brown the meat and chopped onion in the oil on medium heat.

4. Add the chopped cilantro, parsley, and all the spices and continue to cook.

5. Add enough water to cover the meat (approx. ½ the pot full) and bring to a boil. Cover and let simmer for about 30 minutes.

6. Now add the carrot and zucchini (whole) to the boiling pot, along with the pureed tomatoes.

7. When the meat is tender and the vegetables are cooked, take out the carrot and zucchini and puree them in a blender. Return to pot.

8. Now add enough water to achieve the needed quantity, along with any tomato paste, if necessary.

9. Add the pasta and cook until done.

Serve with slices of lemon.



Telling the truth is a very good habit. If you always speak the truth, you can save yourself from a lot of trouble! Here is a story of a man who did a lot of bad things, but his promise to tell the truth saved him.

Once a man came to the prophet Muhammad (S) and said, "Oh prophet of Allah, I have many bad habits. Which one of them should I give up first?" The prophet said, "Give up telling lies first and always speak the truth." The man promised to do so and went home.

At night the man was about to go out to steal. Before setting out, he thought for a moment about the promise he made with the prophet. "If tomorrow the prophet asks me where have I been, what shall I say? Shall I say that I went out stealing? No, I cannot say that. But nor can I lie. If I tell the truth, everyone will start hating me and call me a thief. I would be punished for stealing." So the man decided not to steal that night, and gave up this bad habit.

Next day, he felt like drinking wine, when he was about to do so, he said to himself, "What shall I say to the prophet if he asks me what did I do during the day? I cannot tell a lie, and if I speak the truth people will hate me, because a Muslim is not allowed to drink wine." And so he gave up the idea of drinking wine.

In this way, whenever the man thought of doing something bad, he remembered his promise to tell the truth at all times. One by one, he gave up all his bad habits and became a good Muslim and a very good person.

If you always speak the truth, you can be a good person, a good Muslim whom Allah likes and favors. If Allah - our Creator - is pleased with us, He will reward us with HEAVEN, which is a place of happiness and joy.

MAKE A PROMISE: I SHALL ALWAYS SPEAK THE TRUTH



I'd give her my life just so that she'd live longer.

I'd give her my strength to make her stronger.

I'd take away her tears so that she'd never cry.

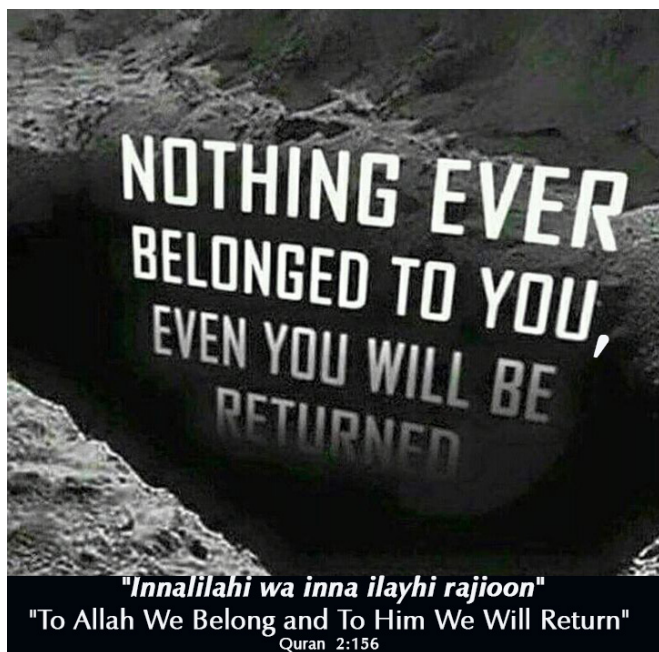
I'd take away her frowns so that her smile could never die.

I'll always be there for her whenever she needs me.

If I could I'd give her happy thoughts that only she could see.

Though one of these days she'll be gone she'll always be my mom with every day that goes on.

IMAGINE WHEN 'YOU' DIE!!!



*Imagine yourself after you pass away,
Imagine your grave through night and through day,
Wishing that you did not do as they say,
Wishing that you had got up and had prayed.*

*Imagine, my friends, the day that you died,
Imagine all of the tears that they cried,
Remember how it felt when your body was tied,
Remember how it felt in the grave which you lied.*

*Imagine the day you'll be called to account,
Imagine the sum to which your life will amount,
Think for a moment of the deeds which you mount,
Think for a moment how much they will count.*

*What will they say of you when you are dead?
What will they say, what will be said?
Will they speak of all the poor who you fed?
Will they remember all the Qur'an that you read?
Think not of them, but of Allah, Lord of mankind & jinn,
Think of Allah when tempted to sin,
Think of the paradise which you will dwell in,
Don't wait till later to think what might have been.*

EID STAMP AND POSTER

Most of you may know that United States Postal Service has issued the new stamp which says "Eid Mubarak" in Arabic and "Eid Greetings" in English. The Eid stamp is an important stepping stone for the recognition of Islam in this country.

According to the US Postal Office, if the Eid Stamp is re-issued THREE times, it then becomes a PERMANENT part of the United States Holiday Collection. For this to happen, we must ask for the Eid stamp each time you go to the post office

Here is what you can do:

1. Buy these Stamps from the post office, use them yourselves or gift them to your friends, neighbors and encourage them to use on their greeting cards this season. Encourage businesses to use these stamps especially for Greetings to their Muslim Customers. At times the person on the front desk is unaware of these stamps and somewhat nonchalantly responds that the Post Office is out of these stamps. We suggest that you very politely request that they check in the back to make sure that there really are "no Eid Stamps".

If the Post Office doesn't have them ask them to order them. You can order these stamps online by calling 1-800-stamp24 or by going to: www.usps.com Click on "buy stamps".

2. Donate a pane of 20 stamps \$6.80 worth or more by listing it on E-Bay in its "Auction for America" and participate in helping those who suffered from the September 11 tragedy.

USPS TO REPRINT POSTER THAT EXCLUDED EID STAMP



November 14, 2001 - "The U.S. Postal Service today is reproducing its Holiday Stamp promotional posters in local post offices in response to recent concerns raised by the American Muslim community. Due to an oversight, an image of the Eid stamp, which commemorates two important Islamic festivals, was left off the promotional posters.

The Postal Service deeply regrets the oversight and is reprinting the holiday posters depicting the Eid stamp. They will be available for sale at post offices this Holiday season